

Exploring the identity of pre-service NNESTs in Taiwan: A social relationally approach

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ABSTRACT: Teachers' professional identity influences the way they think and teach. For pre-service non-native English speaking teachers (NNESTs), they are at the crucial stage of constructing self-image and self-perception as English language teaching (ELT) professionals, their beliefs about English teaching and learning and their attitudes towards changing teaching contexts. Applying a closed-ended questionnaire and in-depth interviews, this study investigated the impact of Native English Speaking Teachers (NESTs) on 258 pre-service NNESTs' professional identity in Taiwan through the lens of social relationality. The results show that NESTs as significant "others" to the participants have brought conflicting discourses to the ELT profession (the micro-social context) and the policy discourse and the society (the macro-social context). In the micro-social context, the participants encounter contradictory discourses brought by the presence of NESTs in terms of what the participants can offer as opposed to what ideal English teachers should possess. In the macro-social context, the participants face competing discourses caused by the presence of NESTs, in terms of what constitutes good teaching practice, as opposed to what is valued by the government and the major stakeholders in the society. Arguably, the participants' professional identity is shaped through the process of interpreting and conjoining these contradictory and competing discourses. To help pre-service NNESTs construct a positive professional identity to support their professional lives, reforms in teacher education programs should focus on developing the teachers' "non-native" status into resources for ascertaining the needs of the teaching contexts they are operating within.

KEYWORDS: NNESTs, identity, social relationality, pre-service teachers, Taiwan

INTRODUCTION

Teachers' professional identity influences the ways teachers think and teach. This established fact can also be applied to English language teachers (Alsup, 2006). Research on Native English Speaking Teachers (NNESTs) is fairly recent and has mostly centred on the teachers' self-image and self-perception of their "non-nativeness" as opposed to the "nativeness" of NESTs (Braine, 2005) or "native speakerism" (Kim, 2011, p. 53). Although these studies have provided valuable insights into the influence of NESTs on NNESTs' self-image, confidence in English competence and beliefs about teaching and learning (see Llurda & Huguet, 2003;

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Rajagopalan, 2005), there is a lack of holistic discussion on the impact of NESTs on NNESTs' professional identity construction. In addition, most of these studies focus on in-service NNEST communities. Less attention has been paid to pre-service NNESTs, who are at the crucial stage of "becoming" teachers through constructing their self-perception as educators, their beliefs about teaching and learning and their attitudes towards changing teaching contexts (Burley & Pomphrey, 2003). Considering that identity is socially-constructed, meaning it is constructed relationally via individuals' interaction with "others" who offer a "mirror" showing them how they are similar to, different from or related to "others" participating in a similar given context (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992; Donati, 2006), this study perceived NESTs as significant "others" to NNESTs in the ELT profession and aimed to investigate their impact on pre-service NNESTs' construction of their professional identities. The research context is Taiwan, where the government has been progressively recruiting NESTs to work with local non-native English teachers in public schools by offering NESTs a higher salary and even considering applications from uncertified NESTs (see Wang & Lin, 2013). This paper starts with an introduction of the concept of identity and professional identity in the field of teaching and teacher education, followed by a review of the literature on NNESTs' professional identity. Findings from six aspects of investigation are then presented and used to discuss the impact of NESTs on pre-service NNESTs' identity construction. Three recommendations for teacher education programs in both local and international contexts are proposed at the end for the purpose of supporting pre-service NNESTs in constructing a positive professional identity.

PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY AND NNESTs: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Identity as a framing concept

The term *identity* has taken on many different meanings in the literature and has been conceptualized in different ways by researchers in different disciplines (see Beijaard, 1995; Gee, 2000; Norton, 1997). Mead (1934) used the concept of identity in relation with the concept of "self". According to Mead, the notion of "self" can only arise in a social setting where there is social communication, through which individuals learn to assume the roles of others and monitor their own behaviour accordingly. The notion of "self" can never be described without reference to those who are around the individual (Taylor, 1989). Identity thus refers to who or what someone is and "the various meanings someone can attach to oneself or the meanings attributed to oneself by others" (Beijaard, 1995, p. 282). Identity is also described as "how people understand their relationship to the world, how that relationship is constructed across time and space, and how people understand their possibilities for the future" (Norton, 1997, p. 410). In the field of education, identity as a framing concept is a useful analytic tool for studying teachers' personal and professional lives, the formation of teachers' emotions and teachers' praxis (see Clarke, 2009; Gee, 2000; Sfard & Prusak, 2005).

Professional identity in teaching and teacher education

Professional identity is used to refer to "a set of externally ascribed attributes that are used to differentiate one group from another" (Sachs, 2001, p. 153). For teachers,

professional identity is “an ongoing process of integration of the personal and the professional sides of becoming and being a teacher” (Beijaard, Meijer, & Verloop, 2004, p. 113). Being a teacher is a matter of being seen as a teacher by oneself and by other people, and it is a matter of “acquiring and then redefining an identity that is socially legitimated” (Coldron & Smith, 1999, p. 712). Thus, teachers’ professional identity should not be seen as something that teachers *have*, “but as something that they *use*, to justify, explain and make sense of themselves in relation to other people, and to the contexts in which they operate” (MacLure, 1993, p. 312).

Beijaard *et al.* (2004) provided a substantial account on teacher professional identity and identified four major characteristics that are essential for teacher professional identity. First, teachers’ professional identity is an ongoing process of interpretation and re-interpretation of experiences (Cooper & Olson, 1996). It is thus an entity that is dynamic, unstable and cannot be interpreted as fixed or unitary. Also, teachers’ professional identity implies both “person and context” (Beijaard *et al.*, 2004, p. 122). How teachers construct their professional realities and how they carry out their professional lives is a process of “personal and contextual interpretation” (Goodson & Cole, 1994, p. 88). Teachers’ professional identity is thus socially constructed. It means that teachers’ culture, life history, and interaction with others all have an active role in constructing identity (Diniz-Pereira, 2002; Sakui & Gaies, 2002). One significant approach to understanding teachers’ professional identity as a socially constructed product is through the concept of relationality, seeing social space as a space of complex, constantly negotiated networks of relations in which individuals’ identities are constructed relationally via similarities and differences (Saussure, 1959; Derrida, 1978). Teachers’ professional identity is constructed through interaction with “others” who participate in a similar given context and offer a “mirror” to teachers for comparison.

In addition, teachers’ professional identity consists of a variety of *sub-identities* that may cause a complex of tension and harmony (Beijaard *et al.*, 2004). This is because there are various competing influences on teachers’ roles in a constantly changing context, which might contribute to tension among teachers’ intentions, hopes, ambitions and what teachers can actually achieve (Samuel & Stephens, 2000). It is important for teachers to keep these sub-identities from conflicting with one another. Teachers’ professional identity is thus closely bound with teachers’ effort to recognise and reconcile sub-identities resulting from several competing sets of beliefs (Sakui & Gaies, 2002). Hence, what constitutes a professional identity is a “percolated” understanding and acceptance of a series of competing and sometimes contradictory values, behaviours and attitudes (Samuel & Stephens, 2000, p. 476). In other words, teachers’ professional identity is constructed “at the site of multiple, overlapping and sometimes contradictory discourses” (Holmes, 2003, p. 43). Lastly, teachers’ professional identity is partly given, yet it is also something that has to be achieved, offering a potential site of agency within the inevitably social process of “becoming” (Clarke, 2009, p. 187). Teachers are in the ongoing process of “fashioning” and “refashioning” their identities (Miller Marsh, 2003, p. 8). Although this fashioning is in some ways a matter of being “positioned” within pre-existing discourses and ongoing social conversations, at the same time teachers have some ability to “author” their identities (Davies & Harré, 1990).

Meanwhile, the concept of professional identity is used and interpreted in different ways in the domain of teaching and teacher education. In some studies, professional identity is linked to teachers' concepts or images of self (e.g., Knowles, 1992; Nias, 1989). In other studies, the focus is on the development of teachers' professional identity in relation to other concepts such as teachers' personal background and learning histories, the expectations of the teaching institutions they operate in and teachers' content knowledge. (e.g., Goodson & Cole, 1994; Volkmann & Anderson, 1998). There are researchers who place emphasis on concepts related to the process of identity formation, such as reflection and self-evaluation (e.g., Cooper & Olson, 1996; Kerby, 1991). The notion of teachers' professional identity is also applied to research on what teachers perceive as important and valuable from their ideologies and their experience in the workplace and in their lives (e.g., Tickle, 2000).

Professional identity and NNESTs

Medgyes (1994) brought up the issues concerning NESTs by discussing previously untouched topics such as “natives and non-natives in opposite trenches”, “the dark side of being a non-native” and “who is worth more: the native or the non-native” (p. 25). Since then, there has been a surge in research concerning NNESTs as ELT professionals. Braine (1999a), for example, talked about the struggle for self-definition and identity that prevails among NNESTs and warns that the lack or confusion of one's identity could lead to low self-confidence and to “an acute sense of one's marginalised, unstable status in the ELT profession” (p. xviii). Braine's warning reveals the significance of understanding NNESTs' professional identity. Researchers sharing similar research interests have identified a number of factors influencing NNESTs' professional identity formation, including:

- Learning experience (Park, 2012; Trent, 2011);
- Self-image and beliefs about teaching and learning (Rajagopalan, 2005; Llurda & Huguet, 2003; Yang, 2000);
- English proficiency (Llurda, 2005; Murdoch, 1994);
- Pedagogical competence (Arva & Medgyes, 2000; Tang, 1997);
- Teacher education (Lin, 2011; Urmston, 2003);
- Students' perceptions and attitudes (Amin, 1999; Braine, 1999b);
- School contexts and norms (Diniz de Figueiredo, 2011; Xu, 2012);
- Employment practice (Braine, 1999a; Canagarajah, 1999); and
- Societal beliefs and education initiatives (Samimy & Brutt-Griffler, 1999; Carless, 2006).

In addition to these factors, researchers have also studied the influence of NESTs as “others” on NNESTs' sense of professionalism from different perspectives. For example, the presence of NESTs might affect NNESTs' self-image and self-perception, making NNESTs feel that they are less competent than NESTs (Arva & Medgyes, 2000), “second class citizens” in the workplace (Rajagopalan, 2005, p. 287) and in a disadvantaged position in the ELT profession (Llurda & Huguet, 2003). Moreover, NNESTs might suffer from the imbalance of power relationships while working with NESTs in schools, causing the former to develop the anxiety of losing authority and the devaluation of their own usefulness as English teachers (Carless, 2004; Mahoney, 2004, McConnell, 2000, Tajino & Tajino, 2000). Also, the presence of NESTs was found to affect NNESTs' confidence in their own English competence,

creating the fear of being negatively judged by their colleagues due to linguistic issues (Browne & Wada, 1998; Carless, 2004; Diniz de Figueiredo, 2011). Lastly, NESTs often cause conflicts in NNESTs' beliefs about pedagogy and curriculum objectives (Carless, 2006; Tajino & Tajino, 2000). While these studies have provided evidence on the influence of NESTs on NNESTs' self-image, their self-confidence in English competence and their beliefs about teaching and learning, there is a lack of holistic discussion on the impact of NESTs on NNESTs' identity as ELT professionals. Additionally, most of these studies focus on the in-service NNEST community while less attention has been given to pre-service NNESTs (for exceptions, see Reis, 2010; Tseng, 2011). This study aims to fill this gap.

METHODOLOGY

There were two phases in the data collection of this study: a survey and interviews. The participants were students in the English Language departments at five national universities in Taiwan. Two of the institutions are training institutions for secondary school teachers, while the other three are institutions for the education training of primary school teachers. These departments train most of the English language teachers in Taiwan and recruit NESTs as faculty members to teach courses in the field of language, literature and pedagogy. In the first phase of data collection, a total of 258 students enrolled in these departments were recruited as participants of the survey, comprising 219 (84.9%) females and 39 (15.1%) males. Among the participants, 126 (48.8%) were third-year (TY) students, 115 (44.6%) were fourth-year (FY) students, and the remaining 17 (6.6%) were students at graduate school (GS). The completion of at least two years of the EFL teacher training program and the experience of having been taught by NESTs would help the participants better understand and respond to the issues concerned in this study.

Out of the 258 survey participants recruited from the five universities, potential interviewees for the second phase of data collection were first selected from those who showed an interest in attending the interview by offering positive answers and providing their contact details in the survey. Among these potential interviewees, the researchers used geographical distribution as the major selection criterion, together with considerations of their year of study (i.e., junior, senior or graduate school students) and future teaching assignment (i.e., primary schools or secondary schools). Eventually, 35 participants (26 females and 9 males) were recruited to participate in interviews. Since these 35 interviewees came from five universities that are located in different areas of Taiwan, skewed results resulting from geographical location were reduced. Consent had been sought from both the survey and interview participants and they were informed of their right to withdraw from the study. Participants were also reassured that the data and their identities would be kept confidential.

In the first phase of data collection, a total of 42 closed-ended questions, including 38 five-point Likert-scale question items were used to collect quantitative data (Appendix A). In the second phase, individual in-depth interviews were used to collect qualitative data from the participants. The interview was semi-structured, which allows for greater flexibility than structured interviews (Minichiello, Aroni, Timewell & Alexander, 1995). Each interview was approximately 20 minutes on average and audio-taped for transcribing purposes. To analyse the data, we used

Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) for the quantitative data and Nvivo software for the qualitative data. For the qualitative data, the major themes were established according to the interview questions. Then, we identified relevant content in the transcription and categorized them into these themes. The frequency of repetition of certain comments under each theme was the deciding factor in choosing the quotes reported below.

FINDINGS

Adopting a mixed methods approach, this study investigated the following six aspects of 258 Taiwanese pre-service NNESTs: (1) learning experience with NESTs; (2) professional training in teaching English; (3) beliefs about the status of English; (4) perceptions of the strengths and weakness of NESTs and NNESTs; (5) self-image as NNESTs; and (6) understanding of the value of NESTs and NNESTs in policy discourse and the society. In addition to the survey results (Appendix B), representative quotes from interviews are presented to provide more detailed insights for some of the aspects.

Learning experience with NESTs

In the survey question asking the participants to recall their most outstanding teachers and to identify three major characteristics of these teachers from a range of available items, knowledge of the subject matter was chosen by 69.1% of the participants, followed by supportive attitudes towards students (68.3%) and knowledge about methodology (62.3%)(Item 1). In addition, less than one-third (26.8%) of the participants claimed that they had learnt more English from NESTs, while over half (50.6%) said they had not learnt more English from NESTs (Item 2). Also, less than a quarter (23.2%) of the participants said that they preferred to be taught by NESTs, while 36.8% claimed that they did not prefer NESTs (Item 3).

Professional training in teaching English

The survey results show that 42.4% of the participants indicated that most of the courses they took in teacher education programs were related to English proficiency. Another 34.1% of the participants had most of their courses in methodology-related areas. In contrast, courses in English literature and cultural knowledge of English-speaking countries were not prioritised in the programs (Item 4). This result reveals that English proficiency is the major focus of the participants' professional training in English language teaching. Despite this, as many as 42.8% of the participants still identified English proficiency as their most desirable competence before they started their teaching career, as compared to other competencies such as methodology (e.g. pedagogy) and cultural knowledge of English-speaking countries (Item 5). In the interviews, a number of participants (N=11) showed great aspiration for "authentic" English (i.e., American English or British English) and regarded "native-like proficiency" as the target of their professional training. The following quotes are representative of this finding:

Daniel (FY): We ourselves (NNESTs) are not native speakers of English, and that is a nature-born handicap. In terms of speaking a language, the more authentic or natural

we become, the better. However, it is very difficult for us to achieve that. What we can do is trying to achieve native-like proficiency as much as possible...I think we should try to make our English as authentic, native-like, and natural as possible.

Emily (FY): English is not my mother tongue. The thing I want to improve the most is my understanding about authentic English because I want to teach my students English that is used by American or British people.

Beliefs about the status of English

The survey results show that the vast majority of the participants (96.1%) either agreed or strongly agreed that English is the most important foreign language in Taiwan, while only 1.2% either disagreed or strongly disagreed (Item 6). Also, as many as 82.5% of the participants either agreed or strongly agreed that English is the most useful language in the world, while only 3.9% disagreed or strongly disagreed (Item 7).

Perceptions of strengths and weakness of NESTs

In terms of the strengths of NESTs, 91.4% of the participants agreed that NESTs are good at teaching cultural knowledge of English-speaking countries, while only 2.0% disagreed (Item 8). In addition to cultural knowledge, 90.4% of the participants either agreed or strongly agreed that NESTs are good at teaching pronunciation (Item 9), while only 4.3% either disagreed or strongly disagreed. Also, 88.0% of the participants felt that NESTs are good at teaching speaking skills, with only 4.3% showing disagreement (Item 10). Furthermore, 65.5% of the participants either agreed or strongly agreed that NESTs are good at teaching listening skills (Item 11). In contrast, less than half of the participants (49.6%) agreed that NESTs are good at teaching vocabulary (Item 12), and less than one-third of the participants expressed consent to the statement that NESTs are good at teaching reading and writing (Item 13 & 14). These results show that the majority of the participants regarded teaching of phonological skills as a major strength of NESTs. Likewise, there is a strong indication of a preference for the “native speaker model” when a great number of participants (N=26) talked about NESTs’ strength in teaching phonology-related skills. Table 1 provides illustrative quotations on these findings.

Strength	Quotation
Cultural knowledge of English speaking countries	The strength is their [NESTs’] understanding about their own culture. They are capable of bringing their history and culture to their teaching and adding knowledge related to cultural background to language learning. (Glen, FY)
Pronunciation and intonation	Since English is the mother tongue of NESTs, their pronunciation is very accurate and their intonation is pretty fluent...Their strengths in pronunciation and intonation are very important to young learners, and this is an obvious advantage of them (NESTs) (Glen, FY).
Accent and fluency	Their (NESTs’) English speaking skills and pronunciation help students learn a better accent. They can help students develop fluency and natural output. Students’ listening skills can also be greatly improved by NESTs (Luke, FY).

Table 1. Representative quotations of strengths of NESTs

In terms of the weakness of NESTs, 61.3% of the participants agreed that NESTs are not good at teaching grammar, and 60.4% of the participants consented to the statement that NESTs are not good at teaching translation skills (Items 15 & 16). Also over half of the participants (51.9%) felt that NESTs are not good at teaching exam preparation (Item 17), and nearly half of the participants (48.5%) thought NESTs are not good at teaching learning strategies (Item 18). Only 21.7% agreed that NESTs are not good at teaching comprehensible English (Item 19).

The interview data provides more explanations for these results. The major weakness of NESTs, in the view of the participants, can be grouped into four categories: the lack of knowledge of local context, the inability to speak students' first language, the lack of experience of learning English as a foreign or second language and the lack of grammatical knowledge. Table 2 provides representative quotations on these findings.

Weakness	Quotation
Lack of knowledge of local context	Their (NESTs') understanding about Taiwanese culture is not deep enough. Neither is their understanding about Taiwanese students' learning process or learning background. They might not be clear about our education system (Fiona, GS).
Inability to speak the students' first language	They (NESTs) might not know students' learning difficulties because they cannot use Chinese to communicate with students. And students can only speak very limited English, making it difficult for them to tell NESTs precisely the difficulties they encounter (Eleanor, GS).
Lack of experience of learning English as a foreign or second language	NESTs might not understand why some specific vowels or consonants are so difficult for Taiwanese students to pronounce...NESTs might not be able to understand why students cannot pronounce just like themselves (Laura, TY).
Lack of grammatical knowledge	Although English is the mother tongue of NESTs, their grammar concept is not good. Some NESTs do not even know the correct usage of grammar ...They cannot explain grammar rules or concepts clearly to students and give students an overall concept in grammar learning...They do not know how to organize a systematic structure to help students learn grammar (Chloe, FY).

Table 2. Representative quotations of weakness of NESTs

Perceptions of strengths and weakness of NNESTs

As for the strengths of NNESTs, the survey results show that as high as 93% of the participants either agreed or strongly agreed with the claim that NNESTs are good at teaching grammar, while only 1.6% either disagreed or strongly disagreed (Item 20). The response to the statement that NNESTs are good at teaching exam preparation was similar: 91.9% either agreed or strongly agreed, with only 1.6% either disagreed or strongly disagreed (Item 21). The survey results also show that as high as 83.7% of the participants consented that NNESTs are good at teaching translation skills (Item 22). A similarly high percentage (79.9%) of the participants also showed agreement with the statement that NNESTs are good at teaching learning strategies, while only 3.5% showed disagreement (Item 23). Furthermore, 63.6% of the participants either agreed or strongly agreed that NNESTs are good at teaching comprehensible English (Item 24). In contrast, the majority of the participants did not consent to the statements that NNESTs are not good at teaching reading (70.4%), writing (61.3%), and vocabulary (58.5%) (Items 25-27).

In the interviews, many participants (N=10) mentioned that as NNESTs, they understand the culture of the local education system such as the importance of grammar in exams. They are familiar with the mechanics of grammar as the focus of exams and are capable of preparing students with useful skills to handle grammatical questions and pass exams. A large number of participants (N=25) also indicated that being able to speak the students' mother tongue is a valuable asset to them in terms of giving comprehensible instruction, providing intensive explanation, and understanding students' learning difficulties. Also there were some participants (N=14) who also mentioned that they are able to understand students' learning difficulties and provide useful learning strategies because of their experience in learning English. Table 3 provides representative quotes on these findings.

Strength	Quotation
Understanding local education context	Taiwanese English teachers know that the focus of exams in Taiwan is grammar. They thus put great emphasis on teaching grammar and keep improving or modifying their methods or skills in teaching grammar (Daniel, FY).
Capable of speaking students' mother tongue	Students can understand better when Taiwanese teachers use Chinese to explain to them. Students will not be scared to learn English because they can communicate with Taiwanese teachers in Chinese whenever they encounter difficulties during the process of learning (Helen, GS).
	They (Taiwanese English teachers) can use Chinese language when they are explaining grammar to students. Using Chinese to explain grammar might be more comprehensible to students than using English. This is particularly important to students at the beginning level (Vera, FY).
Experience in learning English	Taiwanese English teachers better understand students' difficulties in learning English. They might know what kinds of pronunciation might be difficult to Taiwanese students due to their similar experience of learning English. The difficulties they found in their experiences of learning English might be the difficulties their students encounter, which puts Taiwanese teachers in a better position to know how to overcome the difficulties and share [their strategies] with students (Harry, FY).

Table 3. Representative quotations of strengths of NNESTs

In terms of the weakness of NNESTs, the survey results show that 55.5% of the participants either agreed or strongly agreed that NNESTs are not good at teaching speaking skills, while 20.6% either disagreed or strongly disagreed (Item 28). Also, over half of the participants (52.3%) either agreed or strongly agreed that NNESTs are not good at teaching pronunciation, while 18.2% either disagreed or strongly disagreed (Item 29). Furthermore, nearly half of the participants (45.4%) felt that NNESTs are not good at teaching cultural knowledge of English-speaking countries (Item 30). Lastly, a relatively low percentage of the participants (30.6%) agreed that NNESTs are not good at teaching listening (Item 31). These results reveal that the majority of the participants saw teaching speaking and pronunciation as major weakness of NNESTs. Table 4 provides representative quotes on this finding.

Self-image as NNESTs

When asked about what an ideal English teacher should possess, over half of the participants (63.8%) selected English proficiency. This reveals that the majority of the participants perceived English proficiency as the most important criterion of judging English teachers' success, rather than knowledge about methodology, cultural

knowledge of English speaking countries, knowledge of English literature and ability to help students pass exams (Item 32). To a great number of interview participants (N=18), English proficiency mainly refers to phonological competence. Ideal English teachers must be able to provide “good models” (of accent and intonation) or “correct pronunciation” for students:

Ivory (GS): The most important thing is speaking ability. I mean fluency in speaking English. Accent is particularly important if the learners are young children or elementary students. Young learners quite often imitate their English teachers’ accent and intonation. To English teachers, providing good models to be imitated by their students is important.

Dorothy (FY): The most important thing is that the teacher must know and pronounce English very well. When students start to learn a language, they start from listening. They receive correct pronunciation if their teachers pronounce clearly.

Weakness	Quotation
Pronunciation and fluency	In comparison with NESTs, Taiwanese teachers are weak in terms of their speaking skills. Due to the fact that Taiwanese teachers are not native speakers, their pronunciation and fluency is not as good as NESTs...I think these are the major weaknesses of Taiwanese English teachers (Fiona, GS).
	Taiwanese English teachers are weak in terms of pronunciation. Our pronunciation is not standardized pronunciation...One example is that Taiwanese English teachers may not pronounce in the standard forms as NESTs do. When teaching vowels and consonants, they cannot pronounce as clearly as NESTs (Andy, TY).

Table 4. Representative quotations of weakness of NNESTs

The survey results further show that nearly two-thirds (64.4%) of the participants believed that they could be good English teachers (Item 33). However, when asked to compare themselves with NESTs, less than half (37.3%) of the participants thought they could teach English as well as NESTs (Item 34). In fact, nearly half of the participants (44.9%) were neutral in this item. In the interviews, many participants (N=12) mentioned that it is hard to make an overall judgment on whether they could teach as well as NESTs, because both kinds of teachers have different things to offer in classrooms and can benefit students in different ways:

Glen (FY): It depends on what you mean by “better”. NESTs would never be better than Taiwanese teachers if the teaching objective is helping students pass exams...However, if the teaching objective is to expand students’ vision of the world or to improve students’ ability of expressing themselves in English, then NESTs are definitely more helpful than Taiwanese teachers.

Wendy (FY): I personally prefer to be taught by NESTs because they play a lot of games. Learning English is a happy thing. But if passing exams is the concern, of course Taiwanese teachers’ explanations are more comprehensible to me. I do not know how to compare them (NESTs and NNESTs). It is hard to say. In fact I think they each have strengths and weaknesses.

Understanding of the value of NESTs and NNESTs in the policy discourse and the society

In response to the Ministry's consideration of hiring uncertified NESTs, the vast majority (88.0%) of the participants either disagreed or strongly disagreed that the Taiwanese government should hire NESTs to teach in elementary or secondary schools even though they have no teaching certificates, while only 5.5% either agreed or strongly agreed (Item 35). Most of the participants believed that recruiting uncertified NESTs would not be necessarily helpful to students and thought it was unfair to apply double standards in the recruitment of NESTs and local NNESTs:

Vera (FY): It is necessary to ask for certification. If the Ministry does not ask for certification, any foreigner might come to Taiwan to teach English. NESTs who have never undergone professional training and come to teach English in Taiwan could be harmful to our students.

Janet (FY): Local Taiwanese teachers must take education-related courses and get certificates so that they can teach at public schools. No matter which subject is concerned, undergoing relevant training and attaining certificates are the two priorities for teachers. These priorities cannot be ignored just because the teachers are foreigners.

In the interviews, some participants (N=10) challenged the Ministry's initiative of paying NESTs a higher salary by arguing that the initiative reflects the government's favouring of NESTs and the implicit discrimination against local NNESTs. They questioned whether the government pays NESTs a higher salary just because they are "White" or "foreigners":

Bridget (FY): I think it is not acceptable to offer NESTs a salary that is much higher than that of Taiwanese English teachers. It is unfair to pay them such a high salary just because they are native speakers. The discrepancy in salary seems to imply that NESTs are better than Taiwanese English teachers. I think that since both NESTs and Taiwanese teachers have taken professional training, there should not be any difference in their salary.

Harry (FY): Being a Taiwanese teacher, I feel it is very unfair that the government offers NESTs such a high salary. I believe that NESTs and Taiwanese teachers have their respective strengths and weaknesses. The Ministry will find it difficult to justify the huge difference in the salary between NESTs and Taiwanese teachers who stand and teach together on the platform. Are NESTs paid more just because they are "White"? This is the thing I cannot accept.

In terms of the societal attitude towards NESTs and NNESTs, as many as 71.6% of the participants thought English learners in Taiwan prefer to be taught by NESTs (Item 36). Also, 76.3% of the participants believed that NESTs in Taiwan could find teaching jobs easily, even if they are not qualified teachers (Item 37). In the interviews, many participants (N=12) indicated that English learners and parents regard NESTs as better teachers than local NNESTs, without considering their qualification or experience as long as they are foreigners:

Grace (GS): NESTs are regarded as more prestigious by the public without any consideration of their ability...Many students want to have NESTs to teach them

English only because they are foreigners. They do not care about their foreign teachers' education background or working experience.

Daniel (FY): People in the Taiwanese society think all the English teachers from abroad are good if they look like foreigners. NESTs are good because they are foreigners...this is the concept that is generally accepted by the society. The criterion the public uses to judge whether a teacher is good or bad is whether he/she is a foreigner ...Students may prefer foreigners and feel that foreigners are more professional.

Believing in the public's preference for NESTs, as many as 79.8% of the participants thought that NESTs might find jobs more easily than Taiwanese English teachers (Item 38). Furthermore, 71.7% of the participants believed that NESTs could be paid higher than Taiwanese English teachers (Item 39). These results suggest that most of the participants thought NESTs are more competitive and enjoy a more prestigious status than they themselves as NNESTs in the employment market:

Helen (GS): My experience is that learners always look for NESTs rather than Taiwanese teachers if they want to have tutors to teach them speaking and listening skills and to practice their conversational skills. Even though I believe my speaking and listening are as good as NESTs, I am not eligible to apply for some teaching positions just because I am not a native speaker of English.

Considering themselves as less-valued teachers who are not favoured by parents and English learners, over half of the participants (51.2%) admitted that they felt worried about their future as English language teachers because of the competition from NESTs in the employment market (Item 40):

Maggie (TY): I am worried about the competition with NESTs. I think we (Taiwanese English teachers) cannot beat them (NESTs) because they are native speakers of English.

Even though the majority of the participants thought NESTs were more competitive in the job market than they were as NNESTs, less than one-third (22.5%) of the participants claimed that they would hire NESTs rather than Taiwanese English teachers if they were the principals of language schools (Item 41). In addition, only 2.3% of the participants said they would hire unqualified NESTs if they were in charge of language schools, while 89.5% said they wouldn't (Item 42). These results reflect the participants' beliefs that NESTs are not necessarily better teachers than NNESTs and that possessing teaching certificates is important for ELT professionals:

Dorothy (FY): It seems like teachers who have no certificates are not professional. Even though NESTs are good at using English language, they do not know how to deliver their knowledge or teach students if they are not certified teachers. There is huge difference between what you know and how you teach.

Edward (FY): It is common sense that education is about profession and training. How are you going to teach students if you have not taken professional training courses?

DISCUSSION

As addressed earlier, a social space is a site of relations where individuals' identities are constructed relationally via similarities and differences. Identity is thus constructed via interaction with other individuals who offer a "mirror", showing a person how they relate to "others" participating in a similar given context (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992; Donati, 2006; Saussure, 1959; Sfard & Prusak, 2005). This mirroring effect, or "social relationality", is the fuel for the reflexivity which makes individuals effective and is a significant approach to identity construction (Donati, 2006, p. 39). To NNESTs, "others" could reasonably refer to NESTs. Acknowledging that teachers' identity formation is closely related to the discourses and the contexts that teachers operate within (Clarke, 2009; Miller Marsh, 2003), this section discusses the impact of the presence of NESTs on the participants' professional identity with the focus on the contradictory and competing discourses that NESTs bring to the micro-social context (the ELT profession) and the macro-social context (the policy discourse and the society).

The micro-social context

In the micro-social context, the participants face contradictory discourses brought by the presence of NESTs in terms of what they can offer as opposed to what ideal ELT professionals should possess. On one hand, as the results show, the presence of NESTs help the participants define and form an understanding of their assets and deficits in teaching English through enabling the participants to relate themselves to NESTs as "the other kind" of English teachers. The majority of the participants realised that they had strengths in teaching grammar, exam preparation skills and learning strategies. Meanwhile, they regarded English proficiency, particularly phonology-related skills, as their major weakness as NNESTs and readily referred to English proficiency as "native speaker norms" (Kirkpatrick, 2006), describing aspects of language, including vocabulary, accent, intonation, and pronunciation by NESTs as "authentic", "correct", or "beautiful". On the other hand, the results reveal that to most of the participants, knowledge of the subject is one of the most important characteristics of best teachers. Courses on English proficiency also outweigh other aspects of training in the participants' teacher education programs. A high level of English proficiency was also regarded by most of the participants as the most important characteristic of ideal English teachers.

These results suggest that although English proficiency had been the foundation of the participants' sense of professionalism and was regarded by the participants as the most important aspect as ELT professionals, they believed that it is NESTs who are in control of this language, not themselves. In other words, with the presence of NESTs, the participants thought they were not in possession of the most important and valuable asset of ELT professionals.

The macro-social context

In the macro-social context, the participants faced competing discourses brought about by NESTs in terms of what constitutes good teaching practice as opposed to what is valued in an English language teacher by the government and the society in Taiwan. On one hand, the results show that as English learners themselves, the

majority of the participants did not find NESTs more helpful than NNESTs in their English learning. Neither would they prefer having NESTs as their teachers or hiring NESTs at language schools if they were in charge. They were confident that they could become good English teachers. They also believed that only qualified teachers are competent to teach and would not consider hiring unqualified NESTs if they were given the power in recruitment practices. On the other hand, most of the participants were convinced that English learners and parents would prefer NESTs when looking for English teachers. They understood that English learners and parents regard NESTs as more competent teachers than NNESTs and are willing to pay NESTs a higher salary because of their native-speaker status or ethnic background rather than their professional training. In fact, like many other countries in Asia such as China, Japan and the Philippines, where the teaching of English is dominated by Standard English and English learners strive to imitate American or British English and are proud of their native speaker-like accent (Friginal, 2007; Hu, 2005; Matsuda, 2003; Yun & Jia, 2003), English instruction in the classrooms in Taiwan is based on American English and the teaching goal is that learners should become speakers of American English. Consequently, American English and native speaker-like competence are highly valued by students, parents, and English teachers themselves (Duo, 2003; Wang, 2000). English teaching by Western teachers, especially North Americans, is highly favoured by English learners and parents (Sealey, 2006). Being a native speaker of English is often the only qualification needed to teach English, and the local employment market prefers hiring an uncertified, untrained NEST to a certificated, well trained, experienced, local English teacher (Katchen, 2002; Sealey, 2006). Under this circumstance, it is not surprising to find that the participants of this study regarded ethnicity or birthplace as a more important factor than certification in the public's consideration of a competent English teacher and they were in a disadvantaged position in the employment market. It would be very difficult for the participants to resist this dominant discourse in the local context while constructing their self-image and identities.

These results suggest that, to the participants, who must pass English proficiency tests, complete teacher training courses and go through a series of practicum and reviews in order to acquire teaching certification, a teaching qualification is an important criterion in their judgment of the competence of ELT professionals. By equating certification with teaching competence, the participants believed that it was certification that constitutes good teaching practice. This sense of professionalism, however, is contested by the government's consideration of recruiting unqualified NESTs and its initiative of offering NESTs a higher salary. (For detailed explanation of beneficiaries and responsibilities of NESTs, please refer to Wang & Lin, 2013.) The double standards in the eligibility and payment scale applied to the recruitment of NESTs and NNESTs delivers a message that unqualified NESTs are more reliable than qualified NNESTs and that native-speaker status is more valuable than professional training. The participants' belief in certification as the essence of ELT professionals is also challenged by society's acceptance of the "native speaker fallacy" (Canagarajah, 1999) through putting emphasis on NESTs' ethnicity or birthplace without taking into account their certification and qualifications. In other words, to the participants, what is considered as constituting good teaching practice is not valued by the government and the major stakeholders in society.

As argued, professional identity is a complex mix of tension and harmony. It is important for teachers to keep their various identities balanced and keep them from conflicting with one another. Otherwise, the conflict resulting from the competing identities might contribute to a tension among teachers' intention, ambitions and what they can actually achieve (Mishler, 1999; Sakui & Gaies, 2002; Samuel & Stephens, 2000). In this study, facing the contradictory and competing discourses brought by the presence of NESTs in micro and macro-social contexts, the participants' professional identity was affected by the confrontation they encountered in the process of interpreting and conjoining these different discourses that they were exposed to.

To help the participants resolve these conflicting discourses, English language teacher educators need to support the participants in, as proposed by Brutt-Griffler and Samimy (1999), developing and asserting an identity of their own construction that "neither prescribes a limited role for them in the profession nor specifies definite boundaries to their capacities therein" (p. 418). First, since English proficiency is found to be the foundation of the participants' sense of professionalism, teacher education programs could further intensify training in the participants' language competence in order to help them build self-confidence. However, these courses should not solely focus on "native speaker norms", but incorporate the concepts of English as lingua franca (ELF) and World Englishes (Kirkpatrick, 2002; 2006). The introduction of varieties of English into training programs would deliver the message that NNESTs are successful bilingual language-users rather than a failed, deficient version of NESTs, which would contribute to a better self-image of the participants.

Second, courses aiming to raise the participants' consciousness regarding their "non-native" status should be prioritised. The participants need to learn how to take advantage of their non-nativeness and develop it as an important resource for meeting the needs and preferences of their specific teaching contexts. Ongoing opportunities should be provided for participants to reflect on and exploit their assets (Matsuda, 2003). Lastly, teacher education programs should include more contextually relevant content. Offering the participants a better understanding about the needs, interests and cultural backgrounds of students will help them build confidence and ability to fulfil their professional roles in the future. By shifting the emphasis from "what they lack" to "what they possess", teacher educators could help participants construct the identity that they may be "non-native" speakers of the language they value and teach, but they are "native" in terms of their situational teaching competence, which is as much a part of professional competence as language competence (Shin & Kellogg, 2007). These efforts could empower the participants in their confrontation of the conflicting discourses brought by the presence of NESTs and construct a positive identity that supports their professional lives.

CONCLUSION

This study examined how NESTs as significant "others" in the ELT profession affect pre-service NNESTs' professional identity in Taiwan. It was found that the presence of NESTs have brought contradictory and competing discourses to the participants' construction of their identity as ELT professionals. In the micro-social context, the participants encounter contradictory discourses brought by the presence of NESTs in terms of what they can offer as opposed to what ideal English teachers should

possess. In the macro-social context, the participants faced competing discourses caused by NESTs, in terms of what constitutes good teaching practice as opposed to what is valued by the government and the major stakeholders in society.

During the process of interpreting and conjoining these conflicting discourses, the professional identity of Taiwanese pre-service NNESTs' is profoundly shaped by their significant others, the NESTs. Therefore, we argue that teacher education programs for pre-service NNESTs should take a further step to support teachers in their efforts to construct a positive identity and claim professional authority in the ELT profession. The analysis and argument we present in this paper is a starting point and invitation for more researchers to conduct related research in order to come up with a teacher training module for helping NNESTs with their identity-building. Meanwhile, the findings of this study suggest directions for future studies on the effectiveness and amendment of NEST-recruitment policies considering the great influence they have on how NNESTs define, perceive and value themselves in the profession.

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APPENDIX A: SURVEY QUESTIONS

Question items					
1	What are the most important things that you can remember your best teacher? [maxima 3 items] Knowledge of the subject Methodology [e.g. Teaching skills] Supportive attitude to students [e.g. Patience; Kindness; Sympathy] Preparing students well for exams Running interesting classes Using a variety of materials [e.g. Movie, Music, Magazine] Taking care of students' lives outside the schools				
	Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the statements by circling the choice you prefer from the following possibilities.	SD	D	N	A SA
2	I have learnt more English from NESTs.....	1	2	3	4 5
3	I prefer to be taught by NESTs.....	1	2	3	4 5
4	Which field of courses do you have the most in your training program? Rank the following in order of relative frequency to you (1= the most frequent, 5= the least frequent). English proficiency [e.g. Grammar; Pronunciation] Methodology [e.g. Teaching skills; Second language acquisition] English Literature Cultural knowledge of English-speaking countries Practical teaching [e.g. Classroom management]				
5	Which field of knowledge do you want to acquire the most before you become an English teacher in the future? Rank the following in order of relative preference to you (1= the most preferred, 5= the least preferred). English proficiency [e.g. Grammar; Pronunciation] English literature Cultural knowledge of English-speaking countries practical teaching [e.g. Classroom management] Methodology [e.g. Teaching skills]				
	Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the statements by circling the choice you prefer from the following possibilities.	SD	D	N	A SA
6	English is more useful than other languages in the world.....	1	2	3	4 5
7	English is the most important foreign language in Taiwan.....	1	2	3	4 5
8	NETs are good at teaching English culture.....	1	2	3	4 5
9	NETs are good at teaching pronunciation.....	1	2	3	4 5
10	NETs are good at teaching speaking.....	1	2	3	4 5
11	NETs are good at teaching listening.....	1	2	3	4 5
12	NETs are good at teaching vocabulary.....	1	2	3	4 5
13	NETs are good at teaching reading.....	1	2	3	4 5
14	NETs are good at teaching writing.....	1	2	3	4 5
15	NETs are NOT good at teaching grammar.....	1	2	3	4 5
16	NETs are NOT good at teaching translation skills.....	1	2	3	4 5

17	NESTs are NOT good at teaching exam preparation.....	1	2	3	4	5
18	NESTs are NOT good at teaching learning strategies.....	1	2	3	4	5
19	NESTs are NOT good at teaching comprehensible English.....	1	2	3	4	5
20	NNESTs are good at teaching grammar.....	1	2	3	4	5
21	NNESTs are good at teaching exam preparation.....	1	2	3	4	5
22	NNESTs are good at teaching translation skills.....	1	2	3	4	5
23	NNESTs are good at teaching learning strategies.....	1	2	3	4	5
24	NNESTs are good at teaching comprehensible English.....	1	2	3	4	5
25	NNESTs are NOT good at teaching reading.....	1	2	3	4	5
26	NNESTs are NOT good at teaching writing.....	1	2	3	4	5
27	NNESTs are NOT good at teaching vocabulary.....	1	2	3	4	5
28	NNESTs are NOT good at teaching speaking.....	1	2	3	4	5
29	NNESTs are NOT good at teaching pronunciation.....	1	2	3	4	5
30	NNESTs are NOT good at teaching cultural knowledge of English speaking countries.....	1	2	3	4	5
31	NNESTs are NOT good at teaching listening.....	1	2	3	4	5
32	What do you think an ideal English teacher should have? Please rank the following items according to relative importance to you (1= the most important; 5= the least important). English proficiency [e.g. Grammar; Pronunciation] Methodology [e.g. Teaching skills] Knowledge of English literature Cultural knowledge of English-speaking countries Ability of helping students pass exams					
Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the statements by circling the choice you prefer from the following possibilities.		SD	D	N	A	SA
33	I believe I can be a good English teacher.....	1	2	3	4	5
34	I believe I can teach English as well as NESTs.....	1	2	3	4	5
35	The Taiwanese government should hire NESTs even though they have no teaching certificates.....	1	2	3	4	5
36	English learners in Taiwan prefer to be taught by NESTs.....	1	2	3	4	5
37	In Taiwan, NESTs could find teaching jobs easily even if they are not qualified teachers.....	1	2	3	4	5

38	In Taiwan, NESTs may find jobs more easily than Taiwanese English teachers.....	1	2	3	4	5
39	In Taiwan, NESTs could get higher pay than Taiwanese English Teachers.....	1	2	3	4	5
40	I feel worried about my future as an English teacher because I have to compete with NESTs in the employment market.....	1	2	3	4	5
41	If I were a principal of a language school in Taiwan, I would rather hire NESTs than Taiwanese English teachers.....	1	2	3	4	5
42	If I were a principal of a language school in Taiwan, I would hire NESTs even if they are not qualified teachers.....	1	2	3	4	5

APPENDIX B: SURVEY RESULTS

Item	Result					
1	Knowledge of the subject					(69.1%)*
	Methodology					(62.3%)
	Supportive attitude to students					(68.3%)
	Preparing students well for exams					(12.3%)
	Running interesting classes					(38.1%)
	Using a variety of materials					(27.8%)
	Taking care of students' lives outside the schools					(14.3%)
	* 69.1% of the participants selected this item as one of the most important things [maxima 3] that they remember about their most outstanding teachers).					
Item	SD	D	N	A	SA	Mean (SD)#
2.	7.0%	43.6%	22.6%	20.2%	6.6%	2.78 (1.13)
3.	5.4%	31.4%	39.9%	17.4%	5.8%	2.87 (0.96)
4.	English proficiency					(42.4%)*
	Methodology					(34.1%)
	English Literature					(17.0%)
	Cultural knowledge of English-speaking countries					(1.7%)
	Practical teaching					(4.8%)
	*42.4% of the participants selected this item as the field in which they had the most courses in their training programs.					
5.	English proficiency					(42.8%)*
	Methodology					(21.9%)
	English literature					(5.9%)
	Cultural knowledge of English-speaking countries					(9.8%)
	Practical teaching					(19.6%)
	*42.8% of the participants chose this item as their most-desired knowledge before becoming an English teacher.					
Item	SD	D	N	A	SA	Mean (SD)
6.	0.4%	3.5%	13.6%	49.4%	33.1%	4.13 (0.85)
7.	0.4%	0.8%	2.7%	26.5%	69.6%	4.66 (0.67)
8.	0.8%	1.2%	6.6%	33.3%	58.1%	4.47 (0.74)
9.	1.6%	2.7%	5.4%	29.5%	60.9%	4.45 (0.84)
10.	0.8%	3.5%	7.8%	37.0%	51.0%	4.36 (0.88)
11.	0.8%	8.9%	24.8%	40.3%	25.2%	3.80 (0.94)
12.	2.3%	17.1%	31.0%	34.5%	15.1%	3.43 (1.02)
13.	3.9%	26.0%	45.7%	19.4%	5.0%	2.96 (0.90)
14.	3.5%	26.4%	43.8%	22.1%	4.3%	2.97 (0.89)
15.	3.1%	15.1%	20.5%	41.9%	19.4%	3.59 (1.06)
16.	4.7%	10.9%	24.0%	39.5%	20.9%	3.61 (1.08)
17.	4.3%	14.7%	29.1%	37.6%	14.3%	3.43 (1.04)
18.	2.3%	16.3%	32.9%	41.5%	7.0%	3.34 (0.91)
19.	4.7%	30.2%	43.4%	19.4%	2.3%	2.84 (0.87)
20.	0.4%	1.2%	5.4%	49.6%	43.4%	4.34 (0.67)
21.	0.4%	1.2%	6.6%	50.0%	41.9%	4.32 (0.68)
22.	0.4%	1.9%	14.0%	59.7%	24.0%	4.05 (0.70)
23.	1.2%	2.3%	16.7%	53.5%	26.4%	4.02 (0.79)
24.	0.4%	2.3%	33.7%	49.6%	14.0%	3.74 (0.74)
25.	10.1%	60.3%	21.0%	7.0%	1.6%	2.32 (0.90)
26.	13.6%	47.7%	23.3%	12.4%	3.1%	2.44 (0.98)
27.	8.5%	50.0%	28.7%	11.3%	1.6%	2.47 (0.86)
28.	1.6%	19.0%	24.0%	48.1%	7.4%	3.41 (0.93)
29.	2.3%	15.9%	29.5%	43.4%	8.9%	3.41 (0.94)
30.	1.9%	15.5%	37.2%	41.1%	4.3%	3.30 (0.85)
31.	1.9%	28.7%	38.8%	25.6%	5.0%	3.03 (0.91)

Item	Result					
32.	English proficiency					(63.8%)*
	Methodology					(29.5%)
	Knowledge of English literature					(1.6%)
	Cultural knowledge of English-speaking countries					(3.5%)
	Ability of helping students pass exams					(1.6%)
	*63.8% of the participants selected this item as the most important characteristic of an ideal English teacher					
33.	1.5%	7.7%	26.4%	53.9%	10.5%	3.64 (0.83)
34.	3.5%	14.3%	44.9%	32.6%	4.7%	3.21 (0.87)
35.	50.8%	37.2%	6.6%	4.3%	1.1%	1.68 (0.86)
36.	0	10.1%	18.3%	47.9%	23.7%	3.87 (0.95)
37.	2.3%	8.1%	13.3%	43.0%	33.3%	3.97 (1.00)
38.	0	7.4%	12.8%	52.9%	26.9%	4.01 (0.89)
39.	1.6%	5.8%	20.9%	36.4%	35.3%	3.98 (0.97)
40.	3.1%	28.3%	17.4%	41.5%	9.7%	3.26 (1.07)
41.	7.4%	37.6%	32.6%	19.8%	2.7%	2.73 (0.95)
42.	52.3%	37.2%	8.1%	1.5%	0.8%	1.61 (0.77)

#The higher the mean, the more the respondents agreed with the statement.